

Desire, Productivity, Cartography: Imagining Alternative Development through Public
Recreation and Storytelling

A Senior Honors Thesis

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by

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"As self-identified leftists at the end of the 20th century, we found ourselves tongue-tied, not knowing who or what we might speak for."

--The Community Economies Collective

This work has transformed from a reactive activism into an itinerant practice of theory. In the early aftermath (winter 2008/9) of the ongoing global financial crisis, I learned that several public recreation centers were closing in Columbus, Ohio. My informant, a (now former) employee of a closed center, sobbed for "all those kids," her job, and a pervasive sense that management had "abandoned" her and her coworkers.¹ I dredged up dozens of newspaper articles about centers closing, looking for a course of action to take, a tactical approach or a point of intervention. I had resolved to fight their closure, but made no headway on the project.

A few months later I fell in with a group of activists organizing a demonstration against American Electric Power for shutting off the heat to late-paying customers in the dead of winter. The demonstration never materialized but, out of curiosity, I took part in a series of conversations that turned to problems of gentrification, homelessness, and neighborhood disinvestment. Over the summer of 2009 we came to see the Columbus Metropolitan Housing Authority's plan to sell almost all of its stock of public housing as a convergence point of these and other issues. "Curiosity gets one into thick mud,"² and I have since fallen into Greenlawn Village (one of the housing blocks) and Hart Park Recreation Center in ways initially undefined.

I am, in my own time, working to scrape together the vestiges of a past life. I worked as a socially-conscious democrat and volunteer, for the good of society, before a few key blows shook

1 Staff were not notified of the closures until months after the decision to dismiss them, exactly two weeks before centers closed.

2 Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet*, (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 38.

the foundation of my desires. To appropriate and abuse my own beliefs (I am sure that I would have put it much better than I am about to...), I have found that performing good, productive, work becomes only more difficult the more I read about everyone else's attempts to perform good, productive work. Most immediately, I am no longer able to slip in to comfortable musings of what "they" "should" do, just as my subject-position does not appear to afford me any special capacity for "doing" anything (aside from allowing ample time, in the short-term, to worry about everything I do and do not do). I am of the mind that the fogginess of my desires is not unique to me. As "speaking subjects of a discourse over which we have very little control,"³ and storytellers of a limited canon, we are entirely able to desire desperately something, as yet, undefined. As far as "doing something" is concerned, I have come to understand the poverty of my ambition as, in fact, an eye trained to disavow the infinite variation and possibility of what might, under different circumstances, be considered good, productive work. Perhaps more accurately, a personal "poverty of ambition" (and, by extension, a perceived cultural complacency) has more to do with a lack of imagination than a lack of selves desiring differently.⁴

In this paper I try to show that emergent forms of economic control and social power cut into the modes of encounter through which we subjects meet face-to-face; that they produce effects in our forms of social organization. It's been said that neoliberalism casts risk onto individual subjects,⁵ and that this is a key difference between other forms of social control which

3 Nicholas Crane, private correspondence regarding Foucault's *The Order of Things*, fall 2009.

4 Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009) 215. "Desire is never an undifferentiated instinctual energy, but itself results from a highly developed, engineered setup rich in interactions." As well it is the fundament of belief, by which ordinary affects and everyday intensities are processed, felt, and channeled. For Deleuze and Guattari, desire is always *assembled* by complex systems.

5 Aiwā Ong, *Neoliberalism As Exception*, (Duke University Press, 2006)

cast risk onto, for example, organizations. Forms of social organization are productive of beliefs and desires, thus the importance of encounter lies in its predication of desire. I will try to show, in my work, how desires emerge in encounter, and how various forms of encounter produce desires that are more and less productive in everyday contexts. Development signifies a procession born of tumultuous encounter and competing desires.

Kelly Feltault details one such procession in her work with a long-established fishing community at-risk and in the cross-hairs of development. Her work was for a cultural conservation project in the mid-Atlantic United States, to preserve the folkways and traditions for the responsible development of a tourism industry in the region. As the story goes, her understanding of her project changed dramatically when a fisherman asked her "how are you going to preserve my culture if you don't save my right and ability to fish?"⁶ Feltault realized that for all the documentation of folkways and all the preservation of artifacts she could not shelter the becomings of her informants through the established channels.

The question serves to locate communal traditions at the intersection of "public policy, culture, human rights, environmental management, and global capitalist economics..."⁷ instead of segmenting "culture" as a domain extrinsic to the others. Feltault's advisory committee was committed to easing cultural conflict between newcomers and traditional populations by promoting cultural awareness and appreciation for newcomers and effectively saving space for traditional artists in infrastructure-building programs. While the advisory committee identified "population growth" as the root cause of recent manifestations of "cultural and class conflict,"

6 Kelly Feltault, *Development Folklife: Human Security and Cultural Conservation*, *Journal of American Folklore*, 11-9 (471)

7 *ibid.*

Feltault quickly learned that the region was not new to development and change, but rather communal codes and social relations had been fraying for some time. Her analysis showed that the communal desires of the folk group were disrupted by a form of economic development that required long-time residents to abandon "traditional occupations" for jobs building waterfront developments or working retail jobs at Walmart.⁸ She identified the development strategy as neoliberal for its conflation of economic development with human security, even in the face of a folk group whose lifeways were losing all but vestiges of a recognized and treasured traditional culture.

I am making an effort to deploy an as yet jumbled and disorganized theoretical toolkit in what anthropologist Kristan Koptiuch, following Spivak, calls an "internal third world." Koptiuch writes that the third world "names the effects of a process of exploitative incorporation and hegemonic domination...that....can no longer be geographically mapped off as a space separate from a seignorial first world."⁹ This "change" is attributable to the fracturing and "deterretorialization" of the imperial field since the early 1970s, by way of "the upheavals of a new transnationalized division of labor and global restructuring of regimes of capital accumulation."¹⁰ I am an amateur folklorist-turned-community researcher in a blighted neighborhood that is targeted for revitalization, working and playing in a "failing" recreation center, adjacent to a public housing block that is slated for demolition. I do not have a folk culture to preserve, but an abundance of desiring subjects who are often at a loss for ways to imagine that any kind of neighborhood development might provide a sense of human security

⁸ *ibid.*

⁹ Kristin Koptiuch, "Third-Worlding at Home," in *Culture Power Place*. eds Gupta and Ferguson (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997) 236.

¹⁰ *ibid.*

worth preserving.

I begin with some conclusions. Picking through newspaper stories produced, at length, a localized distinction between two different relationships between story and performance. In shorthand this distinction sounds transcendent, but its parts are more accurately characterized as poles between which a narrative performance might be sorted from the perspectives of readers or writers, listeners or tellers. My first shorthand distinction is that there are two "kinds" of work that stories perform: some justify the present state of things while others work to change it.

If all stories change or affect bodies in their performance perhaps it would be more accurate to argue that some stories trace connections between tropes of cultural dominance while others map flights from pervasive and debilitating hegemonies. I perceive the tales which "justify the present state of things" to be those humming the tune of neoliberal capitalist development. I will make a second rough and ready distinction between the ways stories pass between bodies and the according types of transformations effectuated under the umbrella of *imagination*. I have no canonical predicate to imagination as a concept. I use imagination as a placeholder for popular notions of imagination, identity, negotiation of reality, thought, and fancy, but always with a mind to their predication of desire. My second shorthand distinction is that there are two "kinds" of imagination: collective imagination and communal imagination.

A collective imagination exists as a relatively homogeneous construction that is shared by bodies. It is not imagination produced, but imagination distributed. Bodies turn toward it, perhaps standing shoulder to shoulder. It is a relay above bodies on a different plane. By contrast communal imagination sparks between bodies in encounter. It is productive on the level of imagination; it imagines a surplus of imagination (not an imaginary surplus). It is not distributed,

but negotiated-in-encounter. A communal imagination is constituted by imaginations in encounter, whereas a collective imagination is either taken up or not. I want to know how we can conceive of ourselves as networks and nodes with valuable communal connections instead of subjects with an exhaustible list of rights.

"Wassup, Al!"

No one has ever called me Al and made me like it. In middle school my friends knew that if they really wanted to pick a fight with me they just had to "hey, Al" me a few times to get me going. I have to grin, though, when I hear it from Mr. Towers. Maybe only because he grins so widely, himself and grins are contagious, or maybe because he greets me so enthusiastically every time I see him. Maybe it's not what you say; it's how you say it.

"Where you been, man?"

"Oh, I've been busy with school. I'm graduating this quarter, y'know?"

"Are you really?" We grin again and he thinks a moment. "What's your degree in, again?"

"Cultural Studies."

Most often I omit the "comparative" from "comparative cultural studies" to dodge the question: "so what are you comparing?" He thinks I mean cultural anthropology and, for me, that's more than close enough.

"So what do you do with a degree like that?"

I laugh: "Grad school"

"You mean there's nothin for you? There's no job you can do?"

"I mean...I could go get a job at a nonprofit, probably or, I don't know. No, there's no job,

really, that cultural studies gets me ready for, except more school."

"So what are you gonna do?"

Hart must have looked big before they built the mammoth middle school next door, especially with the Soviet-styled solid brick facade, windows on the second floor that still don't open, metal doors with little squares of Plexiglas to look through. It stands across from Greenlawn Village, the first and largest public housing block in the nation. Catty-corner to Hart is a long-abandoned high-rise project block.

I hoist my bike up a flight of concrete stairs and pull the front door open. There are only two people inside, and they're both housed in a booth: four feet of white-painted concrete topped by thick glass to the ceiling. I lean down to a sliding glass rectangle of space to talk to the man in the chair inside. Maybe folks were shorter in the 50s. Loose program fliers litter the desk space inside between ancient computers and CCTV monitors shuffling through images of the center's hallways. I can see that no one else is in the building.

"Hi, can you tell me what kinds of programs you're offering here?"

The man reads them off for me, most of them, because I didn't ask for anything specific, but he doesn't mention the sewing circles or cooking classes, just the sports. We're almost yelling even though we're only a few feet apart. The other guy disappeared into the back somewhere. I get this talk when I walk into a place unannounced and undetermined. Do I have kids? Do I live around here? What am I looking for?

The conversation picks up when I mention that I'm a researcher with the university. I tell him I'm doing my work about rec centers in Columbus and he starts describing his work, giving contacts and telling me about the neighborhood. His name is Mr. Towers, and the disappeared man is Thomas.

We chat through that rectangle for half an hour before he stands up and comes out of the glass office. He looks to be 6 foot 7 and upwards of 260 pounds. Some kids call him dad. The only thing that got him up was the opportunity to retrieve a collection of thank you cards that young kids had made for him over the years. He holds up a poster board with cards stuck to it, pointing to them, reading them out loud, smiling the whole time.

We talk for over two hours, me saying almost nothing. Sometimes it feels like he is making a case for the place. I'm used to that just as I'm used to the disaffected concentration when I ask a rec employee what goes on in their center. I'm used to being seen initially as a journalist.

He says he wants kids to not be "one-dimensional"; he wants to teach the value of preparation and keep them out of trouble; wants them to learn to cooperate and get on with each other. It's not about competition and it's not about the money. He tells me how one of the kids he used to work with is now the State Treasurer.¹¹ In his acceptance speech he said that he "couldn't have done it" without Mr. Towers' help. Finally, he tells me that a reporter and a city official came through when they were deciding which centers were closing last winter. To prove the center's value to the kids he took them into the gym, which was packed with kids playing.

¹¹ Reginald Andrews started his career in the Columbus Parks and Recreation department before winning State office. He developed a strong bond with Mr. Towers at the Linden recreation center in his youth and, according to Mr. Towers, attributes much of his success to the time they spent together. He is presently campaigning for reelection.

"Hold up, y'all" he bellowed.

Then he sang "Say my name say my name," just like the Destiny's Child song.

All the kids yelled back, in unison: "Big Papa Puff!"

I wonder if he remembers this story from last summer, the first time I came here, when I told him I was "doing a research project about public recreation centers." It seems he has come to count me as one of his own, but I never can tell if that seeming is born of respect for my responsibility to be the one posing questions. In any case he is happy to pick his own brain for me. As an amateur ethnographer, I could not hope for a more comfortable working relationship.

He is the assistant programs director for Hart Park Recreation center, a public center on the near east side of Columbus, Ohio. He used to direct his own center before so many of them closed early last year, and he will be a director again soon at one of the centers reopening at the end of the summer of 2010. He is self-employed mowing lawns in his spare time, a father of three, and used to work part time in a public home for foster children with Mr. Goss, Hart's basketball coach.

"So, what are you gonna do?" he asks.

"Well, I just found out that I might be able to help start a cooperative house around here or in Franklinton. I have some friends that want to start a land trust with Section 8 tenants.¹² We could rent, as a nonprofit, to people receiving Section 8 and put the government money into a land trust to buy more properties. We want to make space for people receiving assistance to

¹² Section 8 is a federal subsidized housing program whereby those in need of housing assistance have a percentage of their rent paid direct from Housing and Urban Development to landlords every month.

really take pride in where they live, instead of being forced to pay rent to a slumlord somewhere else."

"Is it anything like..." this reminds him of the work he used to do for the Ohio Youth Advocate Program. He tells me about the bedbugs and the profiteering¹³ that goes on in the foster-care industry. Most of the kids were kind and receptive to him, but every once in a while they would develop a taste for getting employees into trouble with their supervisors and even the law. As mean as some of the kids were, it was the other employees that finally pushed him out of the industry. "They would sneak around and try to get you in trouble....They would try to back-stab you and get you fired....Mr. Goss took a nap one time when we were working third shift, and there were three of us there so nothing was going to happen, but a lady from one of the other houses came over and took a picture of him with her cell phone and texted it straight to the head of the organization. He got unpaid time off for five days because of it and they didn't even ask him about it....That's not the kind of place I want to work in." I hope my after-school plans don't turn out that way.

His is an ongoing struggle to practice a personally formulated social mission through the socially-conscious institutions of the present moment. What I would understand as an effect of the foster industry's modes of organization appears to coincide, in his mind, with a defect in the character and disposition of his work-partners. Center employees, as well, are "just in it for the pay check" and "they enforce the rules so they don't get in trouble...but they don't talk to the kids and try to get to know them." I try to ask him what counts as getting to know a kid but he makes it clear that I am over-thinking the problem. "If a kid has been coming over here for two years

¹³ Youth stay in group-run houses managed by employees. He says "they get 22 grand for each kid. I know they have to pay their employees, but these houses have eight or nine kids each. That's a lot of money right there."

and you still don't know his name what does that say about you?"

We have a lot of conversations like this. He tells me about his wealth of work experience and I try to match his archetypal characterizations of others to different modes of social organization. His descriptions could fit into tales of greed and petty despotism, fool-hardy profiteering and corruption. It would be a stretch to call his characterizations divided between good and evil ones. He is not a moralist when he talks about the center, but there certainly are heroes and villains in the stories he tells me. When a kid tells him that he can make \$600 dollars in a day selling drugs, he tells him that it will catch up to him soon. When Mr. Blunderberg is "too busy" to allow neighborhood political organizing inside the center, he is only making his life dull (aside from failing to serve the neighborhood). When kids on the basketball team want to forgo the fundamentals for scrimmaging, he tells them that without knowing the fundamentals they will not be able to appreciate the finer points of the game (including, but certainly not limited to, winning once in a while). The distinction is that the heroes always love coming to work (as he loves coming to work) and the villains only come in for the paycheck. In the long run, he seems to tell me, villainy is self-defeating, whereas heroism is its own reward.

He shares a binder full of the coursework for an eight-week supervisor training course that he took last summer. One lesson distinguishes four workplace "personality types" and offers suggestions for facilitating communication among them. "Before we took the test the instructor said 'I guarantee all of you will be either the driver personality or the analytic personality.' But when I took the test I came up as an amiable." I look over the test and see that the "amiable" personality is defined as typical of an individual who relates to and evaluates others on the level of their character and personality. A "driver," on the other hand, is a "task-oriented" personality

type. The whole project reads like a simplified guide to the signs of the zodiac, trimmed to accommodate a corporate epistemology.

I ask, "Mr. Towers, how is a 'driver' supposed to help kids out and listen to them when they're so task-oriented?" He throws up his hands. It seems to mean that he does not know, but that I have arrived at the correct question. How is a leisure space to be governed by a strategy manual like the one that Mr. Towers is sharing with me? In short, it cannot be. Center employees are only required, as workers, to keep the place clean, safe, and under control to the best of their ability (this is based on my observations; I have yet to ask to see written job descriptions) but there are no official technologies of governance that encourage employees to exceed the social relation of warden to ward.

I have found plenty of historical allies for Mr. Towers' views of recreation centers and their relation to workplace competitiveness. Suggestions published in 1919 for the emerging structure of recreation facilities in California emphasized the importance of leisure spaces as shelter from both commercialism and self-destructive/immoral behaviors.¹⁴ The explicit logic of the project, in this, the first instance of statewide recreation planning, was that the citizenship of the democratic State, of a free state, is represented by the ways it spends its leisure hours.¹⁵ The report proposes a definition of recreation as "a term to cover all the activities of the individual that are not expended in toil" as well as the solution to problems of the "industrial age" which

14 National Recreation Association, Playground and Recreation Association of America, Community Service, Inc, *Community Recreation: Suggestions for Recreation Boards, Superintendents of Recreation and Community Recreation Workers*, (The Playground and recreation association of America, community service, incorporated, 1919) p55. The association proposes that Americans can live up to the aesthetic and physical standards of the Ancient Greeks, especially with the introduction of mechanized production, but only "if commercialism is not given the right of way."

15 *ibid.* "Just as the type of man is indexed by the play of the boy, so the citizenship of a state is reflected in the manner of its play."

"has created mechanical work that does not breed any aesthetic or moral development."¹⁶

The report, and others like it, also advocated censorship of books for the young; banning tobacco sales to minors; and "regulation" of dance halls, pool halls and commercial establishments in response to (apparently perennial) fears of declining quality of Americans' civic and social engagement. California's report was articulated, more immediately, amid emergent Dickensian reports of poverty such as *How the Other Half Lives*, an 1890 photojournalism project by Jacob Riis. Riis' book was one of the first American works to "expose" the materiality of living conditions in New York's slums and tenement buildings to upper class readers. The invention of flash photography granted Riis access to corners of New York that were, literally, too dark to see. His account linked the lack of a proper place to call home with crime, drunkenness, and reckless behavior.

Riis' work declared that the "other half" of America was more than potential civic energy lost to slovenliness, but wasted labor power as well. A great and profitable nation must maximize the production of its poor citizens and immigrants, for their productive capacities were gobbled up by crooked real estate agents and parasitic gambling games and alcohol. Early official documentation of space-making initiatives could not have been written without representations like Riis'. Riis saw the importance of his work in the affective impact of his photography, its capacity to speak to the heart.¹⁷ I see its importance in the light of facilitating a heretofore unformed mode of encounter between segregated social groups. The impact on the national outlook of many Americans was dramatic as Riis' exposé style came into vogue.

¹⁶ *ibid.* (24)

¹⁷ Pascal, Janet B., *Jacob Riis: Reporter and Reformer* (Oxford University Press, 2005), pg 87. Published on Wikipedia.org. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/How_the_other_half_lives. (note 5)

The National Leisure movement was one reformist force that came into being in the decade following Riis' work. Policy groups and social theorists called for municipal provision and governance of leisure and social spaces,¹⁸ to act as agents of "Americanization," integration, and to improve health and hygiene for slum dwellers and immigrants.

Roosevelt's official advisor on NGOs and non-profit organizations, Mary Parker Follett, was also an early Dulles of community centers as spaces for educating the populace in the art of "horizontal power relations" within hierarchical institutions, and their importance for a truly representative democracy. In 1924, prior to her appointment to Roosevelt's administration, she distinguished between communal "power with" as opposed to institutional "power over," arguing that social spaces are necessary to foment defensible political imaginations. Her work advised State facilitation of community spaces to foster participation in citizenship and the democratic process.¹⁹

Mr. Towers does not say anything to suggest that he is driven by political leanings or a national consciousness that demands community participation in political processes as were the founders of the leisure movement. He also refers to his own work philosophies as difficult to put into practice within an institutional crystallization of the leisure movement ideals, in spite of their ideological similarities. He does, however, feel strongly that teaching horizontal cooperation and respectful responsibility are paramount in his work with the kids that pass

18 See founding documentation and reports of the Playground Association of America (1906), the Playground and Recreation Association of America (1911), the National Community Center Association (1916), the National Recreation Association (1932), International Recreation Association (1956), National Recreation and Park Association (1965), and the World Leisure and Recreation Association (1973). See also Thomas Rivers, *My Sixty Years in Recreation Working for Life Enrichment*, (Rutland, Vermont, 1983).

19 Mary Parker Follett, *The New State*, (NYC, Longmans, Green and Co, 1918). "Individual competition must of course disappear. All must see that the test of success is ability to work with others, not surpass others." (364) "If we want a nation that is really self governed not just nominally self-governed, we must train up our young people in the ways of self-direction." (371)

through Hart, "skills that they might not learn in school or getting a job." I believe the real work of play happens on the initiative of individuals who have come to desire differently than political/social theorists on one hand, and villainous money-grubbers on the other. They are not workers giving labor power for a wage, driven by capital accumulation and self-optimization, nor are they performing face-to-face work in the service of an ideological mission. I observe, rather, that the heroic characters in the employ of city services have developed a taste for what Donna Haraway calls "encounter value."²⁰ Mr. Towers sustains a wealth in encounter, he thrives on it, or he thrives on the density and weight that sociality affords to his being.

Recreation centers, as public enclosures, have come under fire from proponents of the neoliberalization of public life. Proponents of the minimalization of State intervention into the market most often group such centers together with other public works that constitute a category of superfluous social spending. I recognize neoliberalism in my work as a popular logic that devalues certain aspects of public centers thusly, and also as a strategy of subject-making that participates in the production of the strange work relations within Hart. The disparity is between workplace logics of governance via market-calculation and streamlining on one hand, and enclosure spaces built and maintained as the solution to biopolitical problems of the health and

20 Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet*, (Univ Of Minnesota Press, 2007). Haraway writes to make autre-mondialisation more possible. Central to her work are the concepts of *encounter*, *touch*, *truck*, and *yoking*, as relations central to world-making, especially inter-species encounter. She writes: "My premise is that touch ramifies and shapes accountability. Accountability, caring for, being affected, and entering into responsibility are not ethical abstractions; these mundane, prosaic things are the result of having truck with each other. Touch does not make one small; it peppers its partners with attachment sites for world making....Touch and regard have consequences." (36) It might surprise us to know that she is asking, in this passage, about touching, caring for, and becoming worldly with her dog. For folks like Mr. Towers my premise is more straight-forward. His "altruistic" and "selfless" behaviors are not symptoms of his character, but are assembled desires --consequential to a wealth of touch and encounter--brought on through considerable time caring for (and becoming-with) everyone else's children.

character of emergent forms of citizenry on the other.²¹

Illustrative of this disparity are the Columbus Recreation and Parks divisions' publications through the past decade. In 1956 Parks and Recreation operators claimed that "recreation today is as much a human need and public responsibility as education, health and sanitation." In 1969 city planners worked to combat the "feeling of failure" that pervades inner city neighborhoods.²² In 1973 Rec and Parks' adopted the "goal of equal and stimulating recreational and park opportunities for every man, woman, and child in Columbus."²³ This goal carried through to 1978, when Parks and Rec articulated the "ultimate goal of equal and rich recreational opportunities for every citizen in Columbus."²⁴ A period of uncertainty seems to pervade the 1980s, however, especially in city planning reports. I was surprised to read a Columbus Department of Development report proposing an urban homesteading (squatting) program to combat suburbanization and widespread vacancy in Columbus' urban core.²⁵ Rough spots and radical programming were smoothed over for the 1993 City Consolidated Plan.

The tone and the layout of Parks and Recreation publications (as well as city planning documents) change in the last two decades. Paragraphs are dissolved into bullet points, which are arrayed into multiple columns on each page, and the documents emphasize certain phrases by

21 Aiwa Ong, *Neoliberalism As Exception*, (Duke University Press, 2006): 13. According to Ong, "Neoliberalism is merely the most recent development of such [biopolitical] techniques that govern human life, that is, a governmentality that relies on market knowledge and calculations for a politics of subjection and subject-making that continually places in question the political existence of modern human beings." I do not agree that neoliberalism is a more recent "development" of biopolitical techniques, but rather that existing forms of social control are mixtures of neoliberal and biopolitical forms of social power. Rec centers, for instance, are biopolitical enclosures shot through with more recently developed neoliberal techniques of governance.

22 Community Renewal Program Input to Model Cities Planning (Ohio 307.14/C7342, 1969)

23 1973 Annual Report of the Recreation & Parks Commission

24 1978 Annual Report of the Recreation & Parks Commission

25 Ohio Department of Development, "Urban Homesteading" *An Analysis of Community Improvement Tools for Columbus, OH*, 1986.

writing them in bold for easy scanning. Most notably, perhaps, reports like the 2003 annual report dwell at length on the connections between Parks and Rec and other interests of City planners, including crime/delinquency rates, class demographics, growth trends, and especially commercial development interests. Older reports contained charts and diagrams detailing the roles and responsibilities of the administration and were usually written, at least in spirit, by the hands of the department director, whereas post-90s reports take an impersonal, un-authored tone. Where older reports were consistent in lauding the increased centralization and responsiveness of the Parks and Rec department to different communities, recent reports lay emphasis on the value of their services to "the city" as a unitary and homogeneous abstraction. The trend is to trace impacts and common interests with city development goals. The adequacy of Parks and Recreation facilities are measured in terms of "Customer Satisfaction" where "the community" is a consumer of services provided by the city. Every man, woman, and child that was made visible by Riis' flash bulb has collapsed into a "community" that is synonymous with "the city."

The real boss at Hart, the official director, is a desk worker named Carl Blunderberg. He is rarely to be seen in the game rooms, gymnasium, nor even the "control room" at the center of the building. He has an artificial putt-able golfing green in his office. "You know those seniors that come over here in the morning?" Mr. Towers asks me. "They get bused over here all together and some of 'em don't even want to be here. [Carl] only worked the program out so he can come in here at eight o'clock and get off at five....He doesn't want to stay until 9 [pm] so he found a way to start his day early....and when they're here he doesn't even talk to them, he just leaves them upstairs. I'm the one that goes up there and talks to 'em....and they treat me like their son."

The working subjects in production, today, appear to be subjects given to the spirit of competition and self-interest to which leisure movement leaders tried to prescribe alternatives. Almost a year after making our introductions, Mr. Towers is comfortable trusting me with his feelings about some of the other employees here. For the first six months he kept names and details hidden well beneath hypothetical situations. We developed a certain amount of trust, however, after Carl unilaterally blocked the grassroots nonprofit social justice organization with which I was working from meeting regularly with residents within in the center. "See, I could never do that. If it's for the community, and the community supports it, I could never shut them out."

I am Carl's contact for Columbus Housing Justice, whose work is predominantly in Greenlawn Village, the public housing block across the street from Hart. I acquired the title when he expressed a great deal of anxiety dealing with CHJ. "I need a contact. I need *one person* from your organization that I can talk to." Carl affects an air of frantic busyness over the telephone. It would seem that a minute-long phone call is a supreme waste of time and almost enough to push him over the edge. After our first town-hall gathering I checked to be sure there were no complaints or problems. There were none. Over the winter CHJ organized a second town-hall and started holding smaller meetings with residents weekly. Still no problems. The excitement formed by collectively gathering neighborhood residents to organize was blunted, however, when we are unexpectedly put out.

"So, how much longer will you all be needing that meeting room on Tuesdays?"

"Well, Mr. Blunderberg, I can't be sure," I say into my phone.

"Well do you think it'll be a month, two months, before this is all done?"

"Oh, no sir, it will be longer than that. It might be a year before we're well-enough established to forgo the public space."

He laughs. "Well that's not going to be possible. You can have your Tuesday meetings for the rest of the month, but at that point I need the space for other activities."

"Is it possible to find a different time this term?"

"No, we're booked straight through."

"You can't try to find another time?"

"I can *not*."

I spend more than enough time on site to know that the time conflict is only an excuse, and Mr. Towers assures me that Carl could have found plenty of time if he wanted to. I cannot help but recall his request for "assistance" with the center's Christmas party. CHJ was happy to volunteer time. We were excited, in fact, to take the opportunity to engage with residents under an apolitical pretense. Mr. Blunderberg was, however, averse to volunteer labor.

"Actually, we're overstaffed for the event as it is. I was calling to ask if your organization would help with financing."

"Oh. I'm sorry, sir, we're an unfunded organization. We're all volunteers."

"I see."

Meanwhile, tying his critique of the employees of the Youth Advocate Program back to Hart, Davis describes the channels along which information travels through the center. One employee, Shawn, is featured not only for his nonexistent work ethic, but for his peculiar

relationship to Mr. Blunderberg. "You see him?" Mr. Towers says, pointing him out, "the first thing he does when he walks in the door is he pulls out his phone and calls Mr. Blunderberg. When Mr. Blunderberg isn't here I'm supposed to be in charge." At first I think he might be touting his superior rank, but it would seem Mr. Blunderberg hired Shawn as a mole. "I asked him about that one day and he said 'my job here is not to take orders, it's to keep an eye on you!'"

In light of Mr. Towers' observations of his fellow workers over the years, I cannot suppose that his beliefs and desires are reducible to the test results of a neoliberal technology of self-optimization (to Davis being "an amiable"). He is not simply a "kind of worker" spiced with a different communicational style, as the test implies, but a complex subject who is more situated than employed, and for an untrained desiring self rather than a neoliberalized self-entrepreneur. Within Mr. Towers's representations of his coworkers I read a grander critique of contemporary subject-making. Mr. Towers values his self-direction while, to him, several of his coworkers appear subject only to the drive of capital accumulation when they are at work. He seems to say that if centers strive to teach self-direction and an appreciation for cooperation to young people they ought to develop technologies that facilitate the employment of people that use appropriate practices of self-direction and cooperation for themselves.

We are the first generation bombarded with so many stories from so many authorities, none of which are our own. The parable of the postmodern mind is the person surrounded by a media center: three television screens in front of them giving three sets of stories; fax machines bringing in other stories; newspapers providing still more stories. In a sense, we are saturated with stories; we're saturated with points of view. But the effect of being bombarded with all of these points of view is that we don't have a point of view and we don't have a story. We lose the continuity of our experiences; we become people who are written on from the outside.

The work of journalists like Riis has also changed considerably in the last century. I have had my attention turned to newspaper announcements of recreation centers closing for over a year, and I have come to address these newspaper stories, identified by topic, as simulacra behaving much like regional or group-specific variations on a traditional folktale.²⁶ These are not hot-button controversial issues, but stories which feel mundane and incontestable alongside Somali pirates and health care reform. This bares my object, a public funeral eulogy, as one of several expressive culture (folk) forms employed to report the effects of localized conflicts as part of a natural order.²⁷ My analysis reveals ostensibly unbiased, objective, and meaningless newspaper stories to be just as productive of bias, objectives, and meaning as any folk forms they model.

We regret to inform you...

As the story goes, an immovable budget crisis racks the metropolis. City services are cut across the board. Officials do everything they can, but some recreation centers, like some employees of other city services, won't pull through. The department is suffering from underemployment and lack of funds. Loved ones and mourners share their loss. City officials regret to inform us. Visitors will be redirected to the closest other center, but it will be too far to walk for seniors and children. Local nonprofits and faith-based organizations might absorb some of the runoff, but their capacity and selection of programs cannot match the center's. Everyone is

26 The simple skeleton fleshed out differently depending on contexts of time and place as in tale-type and motif indexes.

27 Deleuze and Guattari argue that "rigid segmentarity" is dependent on a supple social fabric. I extend this argument to say that rigid discursive categories depend on a supple field of de- and recoded folk forms. Stories are stories, through and through, they exist on the same plane. Different forms interact with and open onto the world in different ways.

sorry for the kids, and scared of what they will do out in the open, at-risk and unsupervised.

It is not difficult to see the funeral eulogy skeleton, especially glancing back and forth among variations of the article. Most variation is built into the skeleton: the date, city, names (of the center and the speakers), the center's activities, age, the size of the city deficit and amount of money to be saved by closing the center(s). All of this works like Mad-Libs²⁸ or Clue:²⁹ filling in the blank and answering the who, what, when, where, why, and how - not to solve a crime, but for the purpose of indexing an event.

The center is remembered fondly; sometimes its upcoming plans are reminiscent of a funeral eulogist's mention of the deceased's unfinished business. Occasionally reporters appear to have spent a fair amount of time talking to center employees as well as visitors young and old. Just like a person who has passed away, a center is a multiplicity that will never be replaced. A funeral eulogy reports not on an active killer or conflict, but for the passive deceased. Likewise, these stories report in memoriam the closure of passive buildings; budget cuts are analogous to natural causes.

It appears that meaning has been stripped from the reports - an invested reader asks whom to blame, where the money has gone, which city projects made the cut, and so on³⁰ - and the stripped event is appended to any number of grand narratives.³¹ So much, however, is at stake in defining opposing sides and competing interests in urban and local politics that, to be

categorized as objective, newspapers tell tales of conflict as if they were events epiphenomenal

28 'Mad-Libs' is a party game in which the parts of speech are used to choose words which will occupy key places in a story. The audience chooses words before hearing the story, then the story is told with those chosen words incorporated into predetermined spots.

29 A whodunnit party game in which players must uncover the who, what, and how of a murder.

30 Some papers, especially alternative newspapers like *The Other Paper* more thoroughly investigate the cause of death than mainstream news outlets. Perhaps this is the folk form of a police report.

31 Read the comments section of any internet newspaper story for widely varying recitations of societal narratives.

to or divorced from local power struggles. Events are instead incorporated by readers into popularized struggles, often rounded up as parts in national or international issues.³² City operators have skirted a great deal of criticism thanks to stylized accounts of "what's going on" that produce a contextual lack for local events - an evental meaninglessness which can cast struggle and conflict as the steady, plodding advance of real events and statistics.³³

In *Society Must Be Defended* Michel Foucault shows how state management of the life and death of its subjects correlates with the transition from a system of sovereign power to one of power over life. The change in the relationship between state and subject can be partly characterized as the change from a state which lets its subjects live or makes them die (this is the sovereign right), to one which makes its subjects live or lets them die.³⁴ With respect to recreation centers, media outlets eulogize their closure, more combative sources criticize or blame public officials; none, however, is capable of identifying the closure of a center as an effect of an economic discourse which claims the status of science. The economy is reconstituted as an obsTamarate totality, masking the passage of an era when it made economic sense for the State to intervene in the leisure activities of its citizens. The neoliberal city is relieved of the responsibility to make neighborhoods live, and global economic failures preclude any sustained accusation of budgetary malfeasance.

Casting this conflict as event steadies our typically gun-shy, business-first local powers

32 See web-based reader feedback on newspaper websites, for example.

33 As de Certeau put it: "Once constituted in secret, the real now jabbars away....Never...have the gods' ministers *made them speak* so continuously, in such detail and so injunctively as the producers of revelations and rules do today *in the name* of topicality. Our orthodoxy is made up of narrations of 'what's going on'. Statistical debates are our theological wars. The combatants no longer bear ideas as offensive or defensive arms. They move forward camouflaged as facts, data and events." (de Certeau in Ward 124)

34 Foucault, M. 2003. *Society must be defended: lectures at the College de France 1975-1976*, transl. D. Macey, pp. 239-263. New York: Picador (chapt. 11, pp. 239-263)

against organized confrontation and boat-rocking. The report of a heartfelt apology from a mayor under pressure probably does as much for their popularity as a plan to keep centers open. It definitely doesn't hurt their popularity as much as if s/he were to favor the centers' funding over that of other civil services like fire and police. As well it does not call publicly-funded development projects, let alone the dogma of development, into question.³⁵ I believe the contrary, that by displacing the folk form of a eulogy onto the dissolution of what remains of American welfare projects, readers more or less actively build fluency in neoliberal discourses of society, welfare and development.³⁶

In the city of Columbus, the 2008/9 tale included a unique variation, that the centers to be closed would continue to be maintained. This meant, in practice, that the lawns would be mowed, the utilities left on, and the security cameras recording. Alien to a funeral eulogy, the second life of empty centers stands out of the frame. The appointment of non-profit organizations into leadership positions at select centers contests the form of funeral eulogy. This raises the question: If the centers themselves are not dying, what is?

Centers are opening nationwide, ostensibly more often than they are closing. Reports hail their arrival enthusiastically - most articles are likely solicited by the organizations opening the centers and shopped to local papers. There are several key differences in operating procedures reported on, as well there are a number of utterances which I feel are key to understanding what is passing on in the funeral eulogy, what is being replaced, and what kinds of discursive shifts are

35 A notable exception is Columbus' *The Other Paper's* article challenging the city budget on the whole as unfair and hypocritical. (Teter, Lyndsey. *Rich Man, Poor Man*. 19 December 2008).

36 Thought-provoking utterances collected in Greenlawn and at Hart include those for whom liberty and the pursuit of happiness have become loosened, semiotically, from human and civil rights, and more closely tied to survivalism and a Hobbesian view of human nature. I can only blink when a public housing resident vehemently opposes CHJ's plans for a Section-8 teach-in on the grounds that "this is America. Everyone for himself!"

making these changes possible. More centers means that in spite of and in direct opposition to their stylization, the funeral eulogies in the news are not of a natural order.

Most centers (re)opening appear to be sponsored by private non-profit entities, faith-based groups and businesses with a stake in the community. One center opening in Memphis, TN is being sponsored by the director of a private prison company.³⁷ Most of the others target children, the disabled, or the elderly - a demographic, not a neighborhood; a niche market, not "The Community." Town-gown partnerships are common as well. Centers opening are billed as assets to the neighborhood - investments in the area's future. Centers open in areas that are determined to see growth and investment. They are deployed as part of a generalized push to raise property values and make neighborhoods and small towns more attractive to outside investment. They are not planned and distributed to an unspeaking social body (to "*the Other Half*"), but marketed to consumer-subjects and their best economic interest. Thus we learn that neoliberal economic discourse makes possible neighborhood assets and investments where it undermines public services.

The centers, themselves, have little to do with this process. Centers in Columbus are supposed to reopen, after the city effectively bullied³⁸ its constituencies into voting for a tax hike,

37 As early as 1922 studies have shown dramatic differences in crime rates between neighborhoods equipped with parks and organized leisure facilities. See [unknown author] "Recreation and Crime," *The New York Times*, May 28, 1922 and M. Travis Wood, "Crime Prevention Through Recreation" (1924) reprint in *National Municipal Review*, 13 no. 4 (2007) 191-194 for early leisure movement sources. The message is largely unchanged in more recent studies. See "Recreation Fights Crime," in *Parks and Recreation* (March 2010) and Chadwell, Jason, Charlie Everett, Jon C. McChesney, "Successful Programs for At-Risk Youth," *Journal of Physical Education, Recreation and Dance* 73, no. 9 (2002).

38 Threats were unmistakably made not only in the form of dire speculation in news sources, but directly to community leaders and neighborhood associations. While capital investment projects to boost the living standards of the business elite and a heretofore nonexistent downtown affluent class roll on, the city threatened not only to cut fire and police funding, but to repeal basic sanitation services. For example, to win the support of the Clintonville neighborhood association the city threatened to *stop* picking up the trash.

but under neoliberal imperatives to maximize return on a capital investment. Comprehensive pricing schemes minimize losses but refashion ostensibly free spaces as pay-to-play environments. Some new and forthcoming centers write press releases advertising their space for rent to business functions and private parties.

Nonprofits are to continue supervising select centers. Some nonprofits no doubt operate centers more effectively and passionately than city employees did, but charities' mission statements and priorities are not coterminous with the biopolitical mission to serve communities. This is not a value judgment, but an index of difference. Conversations with enthusiastic employees of a Catholic organization operating a center in the Hillsigh neighborhood of Columbus revealed unanimous support for private control of public spaces because private nonprofits enjoy limited supervision, oversight, and regulation--conditions necessary to "get the job done."

"The job," for the Catholic social justice project, seems to intersect with Mr. Towers' in several areas (of teaching cooperation, making safe spaces and encouraging self-directed practice of a creative skill). The organization of the workers within the Hillsigh center, however, is profoundly more intimate, cooperative, and responsive. There is no competition between workers, in part because each of them was hired through supple ties of family and friendship. There is no "corporate" ladder to climb. The doors to the center, however, are locked to the public even when the center is in operation.

Institutional enclosures like rec centers and publicly funded fortress malls are dismantled (physically and discursively) for the diminished effectiveness of moralistic and ideological tools to guide State interventions into society. Perhaps more importantly, the local division of labor

that existed in the early 20th century has opened onto international channels, thereby undermining the local importance of horizontal sites like the factory floor for producing class consciousnesses and solidarity. Centers have not failed to serve constituencies and therefore lost appeal. Rather, the economics of an industrial nation, whose prosperity is tied to maximization of its labor power (therefore the welfare of its citizens), is well under the way of transitioning to a State in the service of transnational capital currents. The technical strategy of maintaining State-funded community training facilities is unwieldy in the absence of a market that is happy to train its own. The market does not want uncompetitive, self-directed subjects. As well, "the market" is perfectly capable of producing appreciation in its products and services, thereby undermining the case for organized leisure as a tool to cultivate aesthetic and moral sense in participants. The new centers are often constructed as "community assets" and "investments" in affluent neighborhoods. Examples of new fortress-centers are slim-to-none. The only one I've found is illustrative of the material conditions necessary for the proliferation of enclosed public recreation space within a neoliberal state.

This center is found in Sderot, a town in Israel that lies less than 1 Kilometer from the Israeli-recognized border with Gaza. Rockets fall often enough that children are rarely allowed to play in the street. Bullets and black holes and blind rockets fall. Everyone is at risk in an outdoor environment that circulates imminent, unpredictable danger. I'm reminded of my unusual admission to the usually-locked lounge of Arnes Rec Center when an employee thought I needed "to lay low for a while." Press releases made during the construction of the Sderot Secure Recreation Center are filled with reverberations of the welfare-state lingo once common in the US. Specifically, that our children will grow up healthy in the midst of the impossible violence

carried out by urban incorrigibles or, in this case, terrorists. I'm using the example to show the extremes necessary for the production of a fortress-center in this day and age.

We live within a marketplace that is becoming increasingly neoliberal in the sense that social fields are increasingly being dissolved and recoded for financial transactions. Perhaps neoliberalism is best characterized as that becoming. Within American cities the dissolution was effected by neighborhood disinvestment and siege, but its recoding is now pushed through in the name of development. Development is the primary auspice under which communal forms of economic activity are upset and fixed as capitalist relations for a neoliberal marketplace.

Folkloristics often documents communal practices within spaces of enclosure, including creative subversions of public space and modes of resistance to cultural dominance like counter-hegemonic discourses. The dissolution of such spaces marks not only the loss of the services that their programs provided, but also the fracturing of diverse non-hegemonic social relations and their transference from becoming communal escapes to becoming collectively swept into or forced out of capital flows. Development is not the parallel advancement of "pre-developed" social relations of production, it is a strategy for imposing a code or set of codes and labor relations on communal social bodies.

If You Really Need It, You Can Find It in the Trash

--Gary D.

I met one of my next-door neighbors, Tamara, for the first time at Hart, which is over a mile from my home. I was talking with Mr. Towers about a storytelling project when Tamara

interjected with the news of a funeral.

She asked if he knew Dave Brinkal, the garbage man. Of course he already heard about his passing; Mr. Towers hears about everything first. He was such a nice man and his passing was so unexpected. Heart-failure. He wasn't yet sixty years old. It takes me a moment to realize that I've heard the name Brinkal before; I had a classmate in middle school with the same name. His dad was a garbage man and I used to say hi to him in the mornings when I still woke up with the sun. It took a phone call to interrupt Mr. Towers before I asked Tamara if Brinkal's son's name was Derek, but she could not recall if he had sons.

The next day, as I was entering the center I saw Tamara outside waiting to take her son home. She was holding the program from the funeral. It was Derek's dad. She says the funeral was incredible. There was a line a quarter-mile long into the street for the viewing. And he looked so good. A conversation about where I went to middle school turns to where I live, and soon enough I realize that we are next door neighbors. We realized, together, that we have greeted each other with smiles and waves many times. We agreed that people look different depending on context.

Her son is Luke, the boy who introduced himself to me on the first day of football practice (helping coach the football players with Mr. Towers was my first sustained activity at the center.). Her apartment block is one managed by Community Properties of Ohio, a Community Development Corporation. She said it's not Section 8 but housing for folks with mental afflictions or drug problems. We chatted for a while longer before she caught a ride home with one of the center employees who gets off at six pm. Sometimes I hear her argue with Mr. Towers about high school basketball from the 70s, when they attended rival schools. I cannot be

allowed time to forget the enclosure space's inability to determine visitor-employee relations.

Social relations produce imaginations which predicate desire. If capitalism is, at heart, a *social relation* of force then it will inspire imaginations and assemble desires. The factory space produces social relations that are necessary for a factory workers' union. The organization, or consciousness, of factory workers, however, is not a capitalist relation but a social relation, a systemic diseconomy to some, a line of flight to others. Borders are for spilling over; rules are made to be broken.³⁹ While the spaces produced in public centers are quite different than factory floors, they still make themselves available to complex modes of encounter that shape imaginations, facilitate social exchange, and build community differently than streets, schools, and homes.

Mr. Towers has his own way of talking about these things. When we're alone he talks at length about his work philosophies, not for self-aggrandizement but for a personal surplus of imagination--one value that I believe is extracted from a wealth of encounter with parents, children, bureaucrats, administrators, policy makers, and communities. He shares his thoughts on the "rat race," bureaucracy, parenting, sports, socializing, race/racism, leadership, volunteerism, community, crime, poverty, and cooking effortlessly because his position is one that brings him into contact with social relations shot through with all of these subjects every day. The product, it would seem, is a social mission.

"For some city employees this is just a way to pay the bills, but it's not just a job" he says. "I love coming to work. I love talking to kids and helping them out, getting to know their parents, teaching them to cook and throw a pass." Several proclamations of this type are Mr.

³⁹ I'm not referring to rules of the metaphysical sort, although the saying may still apply.

Towers' way of locating himself between a rigid bureaucratic machine and a supple fabric of heterogeneous social relations. When I push him to articulate what kind of "impact" he thinks he is having on communities and neighborhoods he starts by shaking his head (I assume for my use of an unwieldy term of assessment like "impact") and resorts to what might be called success stories.

Part of his social mission, the desire produced in his encounters, is to harbor good kids from tumultuous streets. He sounds as if he has few illusions about the black holes waiting outside for the kids that he sees everyday. He talks about kids who are good kids one week and the next week he finds out that they are stuck in a gang dealing with drugs and firearms. "Kids thirteen, fourteen years old disappear all the time and there's nothing I can do about it." In the face of it, he works under a mission to perform as a role-model for lots of kids, and a guardian for a select few. He says, "if you can find that one kid that you know needs it, and you can get them talking, you can change their life. And it's worth it."

I have written misleadingly, however, if it seems that I yearn for the good old days of disciplinary control and enclosure. I do interpret many workers' processions from the factory to the corporation as coming at the price of organized social bodies, effected by the economy, in some kind of general agreement with regard to collective needs and desires. This is not to say that one system of economic control is better or worse than the other, but that analyses of social bodies that co-produced the Proletariat, the Worker, and the Minority, for example, must be challenged to recognize and re-articulate the alternative social relations that produce affirmative communities and collectivities. As Deleuze puts it "There is no need to ask which is the toughest regime, for it's within each of them that liberating and enslaving forces confront one another." I

use the factory floor example frequently because it is simultaneously the site of an "enslaving" force (alienation of labor, forced work relations) and a liberating one (the union/workers' union). "For example, in the crisis of the hospital as environment of enclosure, neighborhood clinics, hospices, and day care could at first express new freedom, but they could participate as well in mechanisms of control that are equal to the harshest of confinements. There is no need to fear or hope, but only to look for new weapons."⁴⁰

Encounters in centers challenge the categories of representational politics and economics by facilitating a muddling of a capitalist division of labor. The boxing coach is as much a life coach as any one of the employees might be a parenting advisor or social worker as well as a coach or supervisor. Mr. Towers says the Rec and Parks administration awards merit raises and bonuses for implementing programs and taking initiative, but that the employees that are hunting for the merit raises are jumping through hoops. "They do what they have to do and then they just quit." I believe that Mr. Towers "does it for the kids" and "not for the money" because of a wealth of complex social encounters that produce a thick imagination and specific, well-theorized desires.

We know that capital is not the driving force to building social relations or producing communal imaginations. According to my formulations, disciplinary rewards are ineffective at producing any desire for a social mission because they cannot produce the imagination on which such a desire must be predicated. Increasingly, supple forms of economic control such as insurance and debt, as well, are effective forms of control because they cast risk onto individual subjects and households. Economic conditions do determine social organization insofar as social

40 Gilles Deleuze, "Postscript on the Societies of Control," *October* 59 (1992): 4

imaginations are unprepared to negotiate, defend, and desire communally.

Other employees at Hart have more defeatist attitudes toward their work. "You can't teach these knuckleheads anything," says my boxing coach, when I ask him about how he deals with the young men who use the gym. His actions, however, say otherwise. Most nights that I use the gym, if he is not telling stories about how to negotiate corruption, pride, money, or discipline in a boxing circuit he is telling stories about how to negotiate corruption, pride, money, and discipline in everyday life. He is also a goldmine for learning about a whole series of sports heroes and villains who fight and fought around the country but perhaps never made it onto ESPN. Once in a while, a retired boxer will stop by to watch, tell stories, and look at the wall of fighters' portraits.

Mr. Goss, the basketball coach, laments the baggy jeans and disruptive behavior of some kids by saying "when I was a kid, we knew what a center was for." He describes the teamwork and esprit de corps of his childhood--characterized by hard work and friendly competition and sportsmanship. From his account, it sounds as if the social missions of centers were once quite apropos to the desires of the social bodies using the spaces. We are at a loss, however, to explain "what's wrong" with kids today in a productive way.

"It's the parents" Goss says, "it's the schools." Who can disagree with that?⁴¹

I say that it takes a village to raise a child, so it can only be the parents' fault if there is an absence of community. This gets me a nod. I think to myself, in turn, that communities do not raise children because social codes face continual decoding and recoding for the extraction of a surplus value. The question isn't whether or not parents are doing it wrong. Parents have always

41 It's society. It's socialists. It's conservatives. It's the government. It's the media.

done it wrong. I knew so until I was 19 and, from the sound of things, most of us keep knowing so at least until we have kids of our own. This is the kind of collectivized story that functions to efface the intersections of public policy, culture, human rights, environmental management, and global capitalist economics, as Feltault notes or, according to me, a story that functions to collectively browbeat us out of the imagination necessary to identify and assess dangerous social forms on one hand, and the capacity to negotiate and develop affirmative communal desires for alternative ways of life and social organization on the other.

The collapse of urban public recreation centers across the country is part of a trend for public owners to sell land and assets into the private market. Such a trend follows from neoliberal economic imperatives to maximize the influence of the private market with minimal State intervention. Those imperatives are often effectuated, on my map, by the practices of development firms, city zoning/branding/planning, and a dominant discourse whereby development is conflated with economic growth. The diminishing salience of the Social relegates social missions for policy work and legislation to a vestigial status appended to economic development.

There are several examples of marginal groups organizing alternative non-capitalist relations and modes of production. Cooperatives, community initiatives, community organizers, womens' and mens' groups are a few examples of coded and *coding* social bodies working communally to negotiate and participate in inscribing the rules of productivity. My most profound inspiration has come from the work of JK Gibson-Graham, who have put their positionality as feminist economic geographers to work in identifying a post-capitalist politics and economics that affirm the productive capacities of fraying communities in de-industrialized

zones. Their work shows that when capitalism is understood as a social relation instead of a totalizing system, it is possible to practice what may, for lack of a better word, be called "development" in a non-capitalist, non-imperial, non-colonial mode.

Julie Graham's work with The Community Economies Collective (TCEC) arrives at community-built "socialisms" that assess what I have heretofore labeled "alternative social relations" as alternative economic activity and micro-socialisms. The theoretical move is to distance oneself from totalizing notions of socialism in the same way as we have distanced ourselves from an all-consuming capitalism--by becoming attuned to the incredible diversity of social relations in our everyday lives, in books, movies, papers, and hearsay.

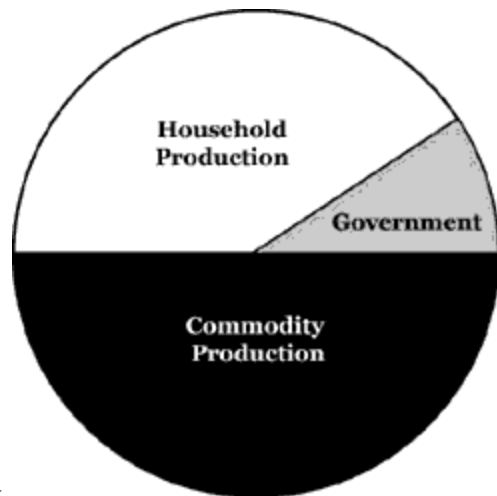
TCEC does not recruit marginalized economic actors to a vanguard, movement, or ideology, but performs interviews and hosts workshops to uncover the wealth of economic activity that is routinely buried by despotic media and inherited collective imaginations. Those media report on some of the same activities (drug trafficking, for instance), but the story form reports alternative economic work as either natural behavior (as opposed to productive work) or criminal economic pathology. Just as center closings are styled as part of a natural process. The work of TCEC is located tactically to build communal imaginations between marginalized groups, to formulate affirmative desires, and to work communally⁴² to establish and moor their newly developed social relations and social codes.

In addition to scholarly publications, TCEC's projects produce other tangible results like spaces of communal economic production that train new producers when necessary, and share equipment with other groups. Work spaces sustain livelihoods and double as places of creative

⁴² In this case, explicitly, by divining their objectives and desires through exploratory workshops that provoke a communal assessment of group skills, assets, and resources.

expression and experimentation. They have yet to *overthrow* capitalism, but their work shows that notion that a system of social relations can be overthrown by another system for the benefit of all is a fantasy that does revolutionaries, activists, socialists, and leftists more harm than good.

To paraphrase an ongoing theme in their work, capitalism cannot be said to have "succeeded" solely on account of its central importance to the State apparatus and incredible hegemony as a discursive construction. They use a graphic from an old radical economics textbook to illustrate that no more than half of real economic production can be considered commodity production.



There is no totalizing Capitalism, there are many capitalisms, many relations of production, many ways that capital, the signifier, is deployed and put to work in a multitude of relations. One of TCEC's workshops in Australia produced a graphic somewhat like the pie chart above. As a



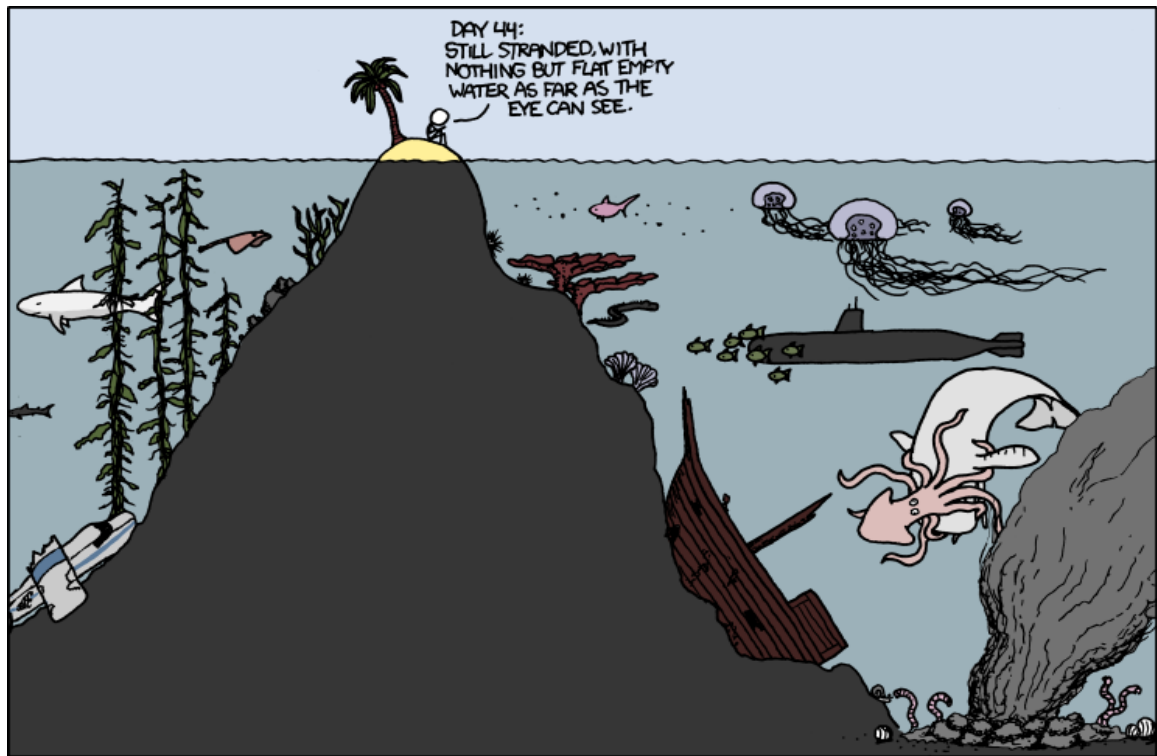
collaboration with the community researchers, the workshop produced an image of the economic activity around them. The image chosen is that of an iceberg, a small portion of which rises above the water, but most of whose body is submerged. I gather that non-capitalist work for social production "outweighs" capitalist relations--in spite of intensifying modes of social power and

economic control, impoverished communities, and despotic media. Most social relations and most productive activity can be called non-capitalist.

Capital is of central importance to the theoretical influence of my more generalized problematic of neoliberal development and communal capacity in de-industrialized neighborhoods. A certain amount of volunteer work happens at centers, parents help coach the football team, or play with the kids in the game room. I have already described that much of the work employees do is in the service of a social mission, rather than for the drive produced by monetary incentive.

I observed, through my analysis of the news media, that journalism, as a genre, builds collective imaginations that are despotic insofar as they are not negotiated communally. Marginal communities, of course, are not the only ones suffering for want of communal capacities for imagination,⁴³ belief and desire. Middle classes have greater access, however, to modes of encounter that produce collective and communal imaginations in social clubs, bars, schools, books, travels, workplaces, and, increasingly, virtual spaces. The thought image I'm reaching for here fell into my lap serendipitously one day in the internet. A desert island is surrounded by smooth, boring, ocean while, unbeknown to its lonely stick figure, the world underwater is teeming with fascinating work. The illustrator writes regularly as a lovesick enthusiast of science and mathematics. The alt-text reads ["...the most exciting new frontier is charting what's already here"]

43 I will contend, rather, that we are all marginal for want of communal imaginations and communal desires.



"Desert Island" <<http://xkcd.com/731/>>

The water line in both instances, is representative of an overcoding line which delineates a mode of productive work that is separate from natural behavior. The second graphic locates the modern subject's productive *imagination* above the waterline, with only a tree to climb and smooth seas in all directions. The work above water is the productive political and economic work that is privileged over the natural behavior beneath the waves. There are disciplines that study submerged natural behaviors in the Academy, notably cultural anthropology and folklore, but the overcoding line makes these studies peripheral and marginal with respect to the sciences. Mr. Goss and I will never ask a productive question, and coach will never hear a new story so long as we have only Society, the Family, and the School as actors in a never-ending story of

how-it-all-went-wrong.

The author of XKCD locates his subjectivity within solid sciences through multifarious encounters with science fiction, university life, romance (real or imagined), friends, web 2.0, and coursework. I have written misleadingly, again, if it would seem that encounter only occurs between human faces or egos. The comics are not tuned to scientize his love life, but attempt to combine social codes and formal codes in humorous and thought-provoking ways, often by showcasing the inadequacy of formal scientific codes (the ones by which we are governed) to account for everyday social phenomena, beliefs and desires.

The work of TCEC is in some ways similar by attesting that the economic iceberg is a solid object throughout, with only a porous boundary separating economic production from creative forms of "getting by." Their work has shown that productive community engagement and communal becomings can be carried out beneath the waves, from which perspective privileged forms of productivity like legislation, city planning, and economic development decisions appear as watery shapes lacking depth or definition.

Columbus Housing Justice began as a loose collection of wide-eyed radicals and homeless people searching for a communal imagination. We work most actively, now, in Greenlawn Village, a public housing block adjacent to Hart Park. The city's imperative is to sell as much publicly-owned property as possible and reinvest the funds in the private market. Columbus Metropolitan Housing Authority's 2005 plan has yet to be approved by the federally directed Housing and Urban Development, but one of HUD's latest recommendations for city housing authorities is to expand Section 8 programs and scale back city maintenance and management of housing facilities.

CHJ works under the rule that neighborhood revitalization is, at best, a mixed blessing. This is in part because revitalization's mostly vestigial social mission is merely appended to economic development. By my count, that consists of a collective imagination desiring economic growth and closely pairing the capacity to produce such growth with the capital incentives of developers and city planners. If the effects are not insensitive to the collectivized desires (by turning out more jobs, better schools, less crime) of the people living in a neighborhood, they will remain insensitive to their communal capacity for desiring alternative modes of development.⁴⁴

For some time meetings were held in Hart because it sits adjacent to PV and feels safer to the residents than their rental office. Residents undergo routine harassment from their bureaucrats and resident-administrator relations are tense at almost every door visited. Using the center's space means I have to talk to Mr. Blunderberg, the island-dweller who ultimately decides which programs are or are not allowed in the center. With help from Mr. Towers and, I suspect, the boxing coach, he consents to the town-hall meeting.

The meeting is facilitated, fed, chatted up, and dismissed later that month. Residents arrive, listen to our facilitator briefly, and then share their thoughts on the situation at length. There's too much crime. There are bugs in the sewers and mice everywhere. The maintenance crew takes months to get to broken windows in the middle of winter and residents are not allowed to fix anything themselves. Office workers fudge documents and try to trick residents into receiving violations, fines, and evictions.

⁴⁴ of course it does, our duping happens when we agree collectively that "the government" can do something about our communal capacity for development--can develop us. The State overcodes and facilitates the decoding of social cods before any development can take place. Maybe the tea party is right and we are all "just looking for a handout"

Neighborhood residents have been promised Section 8 vouchers in exchange for their buildings and most are ready, if not eager, to accept the offer. The Section 8 program is notoriously difficult to enter into (the waiting list is 10,000 strong and closed to new applicants⁴⁵) and easy to be thrown out of for "violations" and "complaints" (the landlord's word is law). I conceptualize Section 8 as a neoliberal "hands off" strategy to introduce of marginalized actors into the free real estate market.

Mr. Towers already has desires for alternative developments, desires built into his experience in the centers as well as his childhood. He says "this place, this neighborhood used to be a dry neighborhood...and these guys over here" outside corner stores "on Mt. Meijer and Long St used to have to go out to another neighborhood if they wanted to buy alcohol...and you know they're hungry, and you know they're killing themselves, and alcohol really is tearing this neighborhood apart. Y'know my dad died of it and--do you know how I could tell when he was drinking?--his eyes would come out like this out of his head." He pulls his eyebrows up and cheeks down, trying to push his eyes out of his skull. "...you could smell it coming out of his skin and he had sores. I never saw anything like it. But it's killing us."

I try to address not the puritanical meaning of his proposal, but the apparent impossibility of placing a ban on alcohol sales in a neighborhood that rests in a city with at-large elections. More pertinent to my line of inquiry, I recognize the overwhelming opposition it would face from the minority populations that have come to so strongly desire alcohol's presence in the neighborhood. I have yet to spend a day canvassing wherein I was not greeted by at least one

⁴⁵ It is made longer, I hear, by applicants mobile enough to apply for and acquire Section 8 in nearby towns that are part of the program and return to Columbus with their voucher. This loop hole cuts into the number of new applicants who can be awarded Section 8 each year.

intoxicated resident. Most canvassing trips occur in the early afternoon. My observations are only supplemental to Mr. Towers' ongoing encounters with children and parents in the neighborhood. I venture to share the news of my own father who, as well, died of alcoholism. His drinking, however, was done alone at the dining room table of an upper middle-class suburban home. He hears me, but we're not sure how to draw the lines between our fathers, the men on these street corners, and the women of the apartments in Greenlawn, so we stand in silence for a moment before another staff member barges in. I try to picture dad on the corner of Mt. Meijer and 20th St, and it's too easy.

If You Really Need Something, You Can Find it in the Trash

In my time at Hart and working with CHJ I am aware of continuous contact with imaginations and desires that intersect with global capital differently than my own. Searching for ways of "mobilizing desire for noncapitalist becomings," I observe "that desire stirs and is activated in embodied interactions and settings in which power circulates unevenly and yet productively across many different registers of being."⁴⁶ In the face of development practices that offer few, if any, avenues for the empowerment of minorities on one hand, and the slough of discarded social codes captured by TV violence and money-worship on the other, I have formulated my working problem to negotiate myriad obstacles to the production of communal desires.

One obstacle is a lack of space. A cutting edge of capital is its inclination to perceive unprofitable spaces as prospects for development without regard to their explicit or tacit social

46 JK Gibson-Graham, *A Postcapitalist Politics*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006) p133

functions.⁴⁷ I believe that the financialization of public spaces cuts into the formation of communal imaginations by limiting the spaces coded as free spaces for encounter. My encounters in Hart are altogether different from my encounters outside, not only in kind, but by breadth and capacity for variation.

Standing on the front steps of Hart one day with a steady stream of whomever is interested the conversation turns to two brothers who I have seen around the center a few times. Coach is railing against one of them for stealing someone's chain last year. Nobody wants someone like that hanging around. As is coach's preferred tactic, he still lets them in, but keeps a close eye on them when they come around. Mike, a boxer who wants to go pro, says they frequent the skate park where he works. "Before they knew me," he says "they acted so bad in there. They still do, actually, but one time they had to talk trash to me and I said 'What? Excuse me?' and when they turned back around I picked them both up like this [one over each shoulder] and they were screaming and yelling. They didn't know how strong I was," he shrugs, smiling, "but they respected me ever since."

Mike's story is much more funny than hearing that one of the brothers is going to jail for shooting someone. Mr. Hill (another employee) shares the news with coach and me after Mike goes inside.

"You know he shot somebody and they're gonna put him away, right?"

"He shot somebody?" Asks coach.

"Ya over some gang shit."

⁴⁷ City Center mall had to be evacuated before it could be torn down because there were dozens of homeless people living in it after it closed. It's an extreme example, but highlights a space's transformation from shelter to territory.

Hill is leaning on a railing overlooking the housing block where the brothers, and many of the center's kids live. "There are shootouts all the time now, over here. They was shooting two nights ago right over there." He points to a spot caddy-corner to the center.

Coach cuts in "And they have that law now where you get so many years for every bullet you got in the gun." Hill just nods.

When the brothers come back outside I expect coach to lay into them for all that he shared with me. Instead he tilts his head back and looks the one full in the face.

"You shoot somebody, man?" He tries to stand tall like coach is doing for a moment.

"Ya," he rubs his temple, "but they're only charging it as assault."

"You got a good lawyer?"

"Oh, ya" he says, almost eagerly. Coach's demeanor changes, at this point, from that of a concerned acquaintance to that of an elder.

"Man why you gotta be runnin' around with this gang shit?" he starts into him. "You're goin' to prison for shooting somebody and it's gonna be on your record. You ain't never gonna get a job, man. You just went and fucked your life up, man....You think you're doing gang shit out here but this ain't gang shit. You get into prison and you'll find out what gang shit is. This is nothin."

The brother's posture has changed as well. He's looking at the ground and trying to nod at the appropriate times. He is a teenager, after all, and coach is finished addressing him as an adult. "I tell you what you oughta be doin and it ain't this gang shit. You oughta be gettin off your butt and getting into church, is what you should do." I can tell he wants to run, but he can't run from coach in the same way that a son cannot run from his father before dad has said his piece. The

brothers come over from the group home a few blocks away, and I can't help but wonder if he has a father in his life. Instead of running, he shuffles backwards down the stairs, eyes scanning the ground, like a statesman bowing out of the king's chamber, until coach starts talking about him to someone else, and it's safe to turn away. He ambles back into Greenlawn with his brother. Both of them look, to me, like peeled nerves trying to play it cool.

Coach and Hill go back to talking about the law I never heard of, the one that assigns years in prison based on the number of bullets in a magazine. Mike comes back out to tell me more about his girlfriend (we both are familiar with long-distance relationships) and practice his jab. The younger kids have dispersed. It's almost 7:30 and the gym was supposed to open to adults at 6. Coach pulls out his keys to unlock the door, but not before a body builder announces that he is on his way to church. "Good for you, man. That's what I'm talking about."

The brothers live in Greenlawn Village, which sits adjacent to Hart Park on Columbus' east side. It is the oldest public housing community in the nation, built in 1939, and many older residents grew up here in the 40s and 50s. Greenlawn has a wealth of stories, but when the topic of steadily increasing crime and decreasing quality of life are introduced into the conversation I am hard-pressed for explanations that do not resort to musings on the character of "young people, these days."

Occasionally a resident will summon the sharp decline of federal funds for housing communities which Reagan implemented and that successive administrations have echoed,⁴⁸ but any attempt to plug the decline of federal funding into the manifestations of crime and mismanagement in Greenlawn is a complicated task. That is, explaining how diminished funding

⁴⁸ Between 1978 and 1983 HUD's budget fell from over 83 billion dollars to 18 billion dollars. See WRAP, "Without Housing," (Berkeley, Inkworks Press, 2008).

for the housing authority appears to correlate so well with increasing crime is a tough nut to crack. I'm not trying to crack it, either, although I imagine it is related to disinvestment more readily than poverty, to the social vacuum that forms when affluence and investment desert a neighborhood.

I'm more eager to ask if concentrated poverty is, in fact, an obstacle to communality and non-hegemonic desires. The work of JK Gibson-Graham and TCEC suggests that poor communities, especially those that have lived through de-industrialization,⁴⁹ are eager to set into neighborhood development works that present opportunities for learning, sharing, and using the skills that they know.⁵⁰ I would extend their analysis to include much of the crime in the neighborhood as alternative economic work, not to validate or valorize the violence of the drug trade or stealing, but to see possibilities for those economic actors to perform economic work that is not visible to analyses that take non-capitalist work as natural behavior. TCEC's work, in this perspective, begins to resonate closely with the work of groups like Cease Fire,⁵¹ whereby "gangs" slowly find transformation into "community organizations" through facilitated communality with neighborhood residents and non-hegemonic political thinkers.

I have come to see Greenlawn and Hart figuratively as logs in the river of development. The city is composed of flows of bodies, bricks, and wealth that seem out of time with the space

49 De-industrialization is, as I understand it, one well-told story of disinvestment, whereby industry invests in a local population of working people and around-which social codes develop on the floors of work sites. When industry moves out populations suffer not only for lack of income, but for disrupted subject-position.

50 The Community Economies Collective, *Imagining and Enacting Noncapitalist Futures*, Socialist Review, Vol 28, Nos 3-4 (2001): 93-135

51 "CeaseFire is the first initiative of the Chicago Project for Violence Prevention. It works with community-based organizations to develop and implement strategies to reduce and prevent violence, particularly shootings and killings. CeaseFire relies on outreach workers, faith leaders, and other community leaders to intervene in conflicts, or potential conflicts, and promote alternatives to violence."
http://www.ceasefirechicago.org/program_description.shtml

inside Hart and Greenlawn. Our ability to assess the neighborhood as embodying part of an ideological mission, however, is failing even more drastically than the public centers within market-driven calculations for the management of urban populations.

Greenlawn is, like most of Columbus' public housing communities, scheduled to be evacuated and sold to a private investor. CHJ works, ideally, as a group of community organizers who help tackle problems identified by Greenlawn residents in house meetings and town-hall style gatherings. From my door-knocking I cannot help but acknowledge that there is a general atmosphere of despondence in the neighborhood(a "feeling of failure," perhaps, as in the 1969 rec and parks annual report). Older residents who remember times when the neighborhood was a safe and supportive community endorse plans to try to save the buildings and fix the problems (most frequently bugs, crime, and maintenance problems). Younger residents, immigrants/refugees, and recent arrivals, however, most often support the housing authority's plans to demolish the buildings and compensate residents with Section 8 vouchers.

CHJ began work in the neighborhood in the fallout of Cincinnati's transition to Section 8 lending, through which it was evidenced that the transition appeals to city authorities because it liquidates assets. Soon after converting to Section 8, there began outcries from recipients and homeowners. Homeowners' associations fought to exclude Section 8 rentals from their neighborhoods, and tenants fought the sale of their homes. When the majority of such efforts were ineffective, the housing authority did not hesitate to begin cutting compensation packages for renters. Cincinnati's Housing Authority argued that their funding was cut, and either compensation would be lifted as either a percentage of each recipient's package or the pool of

recipients would have to be decreased by about 300 families.⁵² Other story-tellers have convincingly linked developments in HUD policy through the Reagan and Clinton administrations with the Cincinnati riots of April 2001.⁵³ The CHJ blog reads that "it is a lot easier to eliminate a line item on a budget than tear down a building."⁵⁴

I remember clearly the first day I canvassed Greenlawn. It was a sunny Saturday afternoon in September of 2009. As my introduction, I say "Hi. I'm Alex, with Columbus Housing Justice, and I'm here to find out what people think about the demolition of Greenlawn Village." I'm ready with pen in hand to take notes, but there is no hesitation from my first answer. He says "tear it down" and waits for me to say something else. I'm under the impression, at this point, that I'm hunting for allies, so I thank him for his time and move on. A few more doors yield similar results, until I meet an ex-con who already knows that, regardless of an affordable housing shortage, he will have a difficult time finding housing on the private market.

He tells me that he worries about trying to move out of here because the private landlords that accept Section 8 will sooner dismiss an applicant with a record than one without. He knows that Section 8 will not let him move anywhere he wants "like they [CMHA] make it sound" and that many of the properties accepting Section 8 are clustered deep inside areas of suburban sprawl. He worries that he will have to move into a property managed by a slumlord who knows that residents can be intimidated by threatening to evict them or otherwise disqualify them from receiving assistance. He says he knows that the legal system is relatively unforgiving and

52 Monk, Dan. Section 8 rent drop worries some. Business Courier of Cincinnati. 18 March 2005. <http://www.bizjournals.com/cincinnati/stories/2005/03/21/story1.html>

53 See White, Jerry. The Cincinnati riots and the housing crisis in the US. International Committee of the Fourth International. 5 July 2001. <http://www.wsws.org/articles/2001/jul2001/cin-j05.shtml>

54 <http://housingjustice.wordpress.com/2009/09/27/will-columbus-go-the-way-of-cincinnati/>

unsympathetic to the circumstances of folks with little money and limited mobility attempting to file claims against slumlords.

He says that Greenlawn was designed to be somehow rehabilitative for tenants, a "place for people to get back on their feet," but that somehow it has turned into something like a "trap," where generations of families never make it out of the projects. "I'm trying to get out quick as I can, trying to get a job but it's not looking good." I ask him what he likes about the neighborhood, but it is "not much" because the crime is so bad and the property is neglected. It is, however, located along major bus lines into and around the city. When I finally get to asking him about what he thinks could change in the neighborhood we exchange not much more than silence. "This place could be great but I don't know."

This place could be great, I tell myself, but many residents either disagree or come back "it could be, but it's not." Every day is harder and harder, every day it gets worse. I am greeted by horror stories about nests of mice, millions of roaches, holes in walls, mold (including black mold), broken windows, and toilets falling through floors. Formal requests for maintenance work are ignored, lost, backlogged or otherwise intercepted between the residents making the reports and the maintenance workers that would be responding to them. Lease agreements forbid residents from making alterations or repairs to their own living space.

CHJ resolved to work with residents to stop the sale of public housing, but were unprepared to meet a neighborhood so sharply divided between those who want to stay and those eager to leave. Fairly comfortable in our decision that the transition to Section 8 was contrary to the best interests of residents, our door-knocking rap took up questions and data designed to characterize the housing authority's plan as one that is unconcerned with the livelihood of low-

income families. While we have had some success building relationships with residents this way, the formal composition of the relationship depends on CHJ members stopping the housing authority from surrendering residents to potentially worse living conditions.

"Back then there used to be classes to take at the rental office," says Mae, a resident of 50 years. "I did crafts over there with some of these ladies around here. They ran a tight ship out here. Mr. Caldwell didn't put up with all this drinking and drug-dealing, and if you had a problem you knew they'd come and fix it.... There used to be hardwood floors and thick walls. Now there's these flimsy tiles and if you trip you might put a hole right through to the neighbor's place it's so thin. I can hear everything they're doing over there. You see this," she points to her kitchen ceiling, "when they remodeled this place last time I came home and found bare gas pipes hanging out of the ceiling. They had redone everything but they did it so cheap that they didn't even put in a ceiling to cover my pipes." She called, however, and was able to have it fixed. Without my asking, she attributes the timely repair to her long history in the neighborhood and past service on the resident's council.

Mae's stories are valuable for their power to intervene in narratives, scholarly and otherwise, that conflate national inscriptions of poverty with the difficulties facing Greenlawn residents and similar pockets of urban poverty. She has the power to show that the challenges facing Greenlawn residents are not of an old story, or at least not the one that pathologizes and criminalizes tenants of public housing. Such a narrative, according to Kristan Koptiuch, is a product of pluralist, relativist liberalism, "...the deepest damage" of which "lies in its covering over of historical *discontinuity* by arguing that we've *always* been a society of immigrants; there have *always* been sweat-shops, racism, homelessness, battered women, intrafamily abuse, gang

warfare, youth suicide, and so on."⁵⁵

Most residents, however, are unable to find their ways onto management's good side. The risk of being identified as a troublemaker is a risk that outweighs the potential benefit of bringing problems to light. "I was being ignored by Tanya and the other office workers so I tried to go over their heads but it still didn't get me anywhere....I guess she heard about it because the next time I paid rent she told that I don't have to pay rent anymore" says a less-fortunate resident. "I knew she was just trying to get me an eviction notice so they could kick me out of here and keep me from getting my Section 8, so I keep paying my rent, but they're sneaky, they'll try to get you into trouble if you rock the boat too much."

Hers is just one of many stories that plainly accuse "the office" of crossing informal and bureaucratic wires to settle issues of character and "petty" disputes with residents. "They laugh at our problems, in there," says one woman. "They laugh at us." Another adds that "they think we're too stupid to know when our thermostat or our air conditioner isn't working, so they don't file our reports.....It's like we're barely human."

When a situation finally becomes politically or legally dangerous for the bureaucrats they isolate dangerous residents and deal with their concerns individually. I've heard the black mold story a few times in my time at Greenlawn. A few years ago there was a woman living in Greenlawn with her baby. One day she noticed what looks like black mold in her home. She files a report, of course, but the office just tells her to scrub it with bleach. Of course, bleach does not kill black mold, and working in the proximity of black mold is a health risk without a respirator.

55 In "Third-Worlding at Home" (*Culture Power Place*, eds Gupta and Ferguson) p245, Koptiuch continues to say that "Supplying a national, linear, and continuous history pseudoarchaizes the irreducibly *new* relationship that such cultural and economic practices now hold to the structures and discourses of domination and exploitation."

She did what they said, but of course the mold returns in a few days, so she returns to the office and tells them again that it was black mold and needs to be addressed by a professional who can assess the soundness of the basement, repair leaks, and properly exterminate the fungus. When she tells the office, however, they tell her that they didn't believe that she had tried to clean the mold and that she just wants to make life difficult for everyone else.

She keeps cleaning the mold and reporting her problem to the office but they won't take any action until she finally calls out a professional to confirm that it's black mold. She and her baby have been living with the stuff for months, at this point, all the while being laughed at by the office. She takes the report that the man makes and calls a lawyer to threaten to sue the housing authority for endangering her health and the health of her child. She lives out in Dublin, now, because they knew they had to keep her quiet about the whole thing, "but she sure got moved quick, after that."

There are consistent patterns to the ways tenants understand their interactions with managers. that there is no shortage of labor power to run inspections but a terrible shortage of power to fix problems. That they will ignore the presence of neighbors engaged in prostitution or illicit drug sales as long as those tenants don't make more work for the managers, while "responsible" neighbors are punished for trying to follow established channels.

There's no shortage of ways for a manager to make a resident's life miserable, either, based only on the leasing agreements for the property. Appended to long lists of requirements for upkeep⁵⁶ and behavioral standards, residents are required to perform a certain number of hours of "community service." "...Have you ever seen those ladies walking around picking up trash?" the

⁵⁶ Which dictate the color and fabric of the drapes, for example.

same resident asks, "they're doing their community service because the office says that they can't have their voucher if they're not caught up on all of their hours." The sight is eerily reminiscent of convicts fulfilling service requirements by picking up trash along the interstate.

One mother says she sends her teenage son to a charter school away from Dulles, the public school around the corner. He looks about 70 pounds overweight, and mom insists that he stay inside from the time he leaves school to the time he goes back. She, along with several other mothers, admit that they forbid their kids from playing outside or walking to Hart to play under supervision. The walk to Hart is, at most, a 200 yard walk, and mothers living within 50 yards of its front door tell me that they fear their kids will find trouble with drug dealers, stray bullets, or the "Goonies," the local children's gang.

There are furtive glances at almost every door I come to. People tell me "you be careful walking around out here" and even offer their apartments as sanctuary in case of trouble. I appreciate the sentiment as a gesture and, increasingly, a practical possibility. Hearing more and more about how dangerous this neighborhood is; I can't help glancing over my shoulder and casting furtive glances of my own. The openness and honesty, however, of every person who opens their door to me is competing with their, fairly uniform, characterizations of the neighborhood.

I hear that "these people around here are all crackheads and criminals" enough times that I cannot help but wonder where they could be hiding. I have to ask why everyone thinks that their neighbors are crackheads; why, in fact, one neighbor will tell me that their neighbor is a crackhead, whereupon knocking the next door, the second neighbor tells me that the person I just talked to is a crackhead, and that a pattern can quite easily and in a short period of time, be

replicated to account for every door as one which houses crackheads and criminals. When I finally start asking residents why this is happening I am greeted with a few different explanations.

The first is that everyone (excepting, of course, the speaker) really *is* a crackhead and criminal, and they are only trying to throw me off in case I happen to be a police officer. I find this hard to believe. The second is that there are "good parts and bad parts" of Greenlawn, and the people who are crack addicts are concentrated in the bad parts. I find this to be slightly more plausible, but it backpedals from the assertion that everyone and their neighbor is a crack addict and avoids my line of questioning. I want to know why a relatively dense community of subaltern economic actors is apparently unable to develop a collective imagination or communal figure of consciousness.

CHJ's work has been hampered from the start because we each assumed, at some level, that residents of Greenlawn imagined themselves to be part of a greater community. We have found, however, that most residents imagine themselves as taking shelter from the neighborhood, as one-against instead of one-among. CHJ has understood the demolition of public housing as an attack on the poorest of people *as a group*, for whom section-8 is simply a less-adequate service but a more-convenient tool for the city. The Section 8 program is not a strategy to dupe residents into an unfair trade (a physical home for a paper voucher), but a (ineffective) response to atomized subjects fighting against a (real or imagined) mass of unreasonable and criminally-inclined vagrants who cannot be trusted and cannot cooperate.

We, CHJ, may have gone so far as to assume we would find a kind of consciousness to engage or, as some members articulated, "agitate" toward action. Efforts at agitation in the

traditional sense, however, only seem to intensify fears which, like fear of crime, weigh on social bonds and encourage survivalism and competition.⁵⁷ In this light, that many of us think politically, and by which we map the figures of descendants of owners/workers. But consciousness is organization, and if there is social organization in Greenlawn, its most prevalent form appears to be the mobsterism and gangsterism that proliferates in the absence of and impedes the formation of other social codes.

People here are frightened with an urgency that suggests close contact with violent crime, but articulate it with a vagueness that suggests that the bad guys are somehow completely divorced from the families who live in the neighborhood. Crime is either a presence that enters the neighborhood from without, or a pervasive fact of the buildings. I find that Greenlawn residents articulate their relationship with city bureaucracy in specific terms (by describing specific practices of office workers, frequently calling them by name and position, or by describing the exact legal terms of their predicaments) but tenants' relationships with crime are articulated in simultaneously specific terms (a child stole my purse, a man entered my window) and grander codes and stereotypes proliferated by the news media. At any rate, "crime" in the neighborhood is not to be engaged on a person to person basis, but is a disease that is expected to be engaged by environmental treatments.

When I ask folks to tell me how crime in the neighborhood might be curbed I hear tenant requests for a greater police presence in the neighborhood.⁵⁸ I hear appeals to police officers to

57 Tenants who took our advances seriously established bonds with CHJ members, as I said earlier, but not with one another. This places an unbearable burden on CHJ members (we are a small, all-volunteer group) that is inscribed with the social relations of established advocacy and support organizations to underrepresented communities.

58 Greenlawn is shared by two different precincts. Residents complain that police response time to violent crimes is such that the authorities cannot be expected to protect anyone.

respond to calls in their neighborhood in a timely and respectful fashion. I hear calls to tear down the buildings and build condos. I hear requests for the management to enforce the rules more strictly (and, of course, evenly). I hear requests for police efforts to evacuate homeless populations.

One young man insists that Greenlawn must implement a neighborhood security system to "keep out all of these girls' boyfriends" who are frequently accused of causing much of the crime. "They should put up security cameras...and give us key cards to come in and out of the neighborhood." Of course this young man's solution is based exactly on the geographies and security technologies of wealthy gated communities designed to exclude the poor. I have found that every ready response to the question "how can we make the neighborhood safer" begin with the phrase "*they* should..." instead of "we can."

Trash-talk Autonomy

This sentiment is by no means exclusive to Greenlawn residents. JK Gibson-Graham note that political leftists, as well, focus their "political imagination--somewhat blankly--on a millennial future revolution" without acknowledging that "if the 'revolution' were to occur in a time-world discontinuous with this one, it would not be possible to talk about steps and strategies for getting there."⁵⁹ (xxii) The search for a politics that has the power to affirm creative action and experimentation in the present moment is the search for a gift that cannot be delivered. My guides to Marx and consciousness, Monsieur Dupont, throw a wrench into the work of "prorevolutionaries" by arguing that "Theories of consciousness and organization are always

59 JK Gibson-Graham, *A Postcapitalist Politics*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006) xxiii

attempts to impose past reflective forms onto living struggles - consciousness in these schemes becomes a stage, a precondition for revolution."⁶⁰ Their intervention is directed toward those same millennial leftists who organize around past reflective forms, the lines of a time-world discontinuous with living struggles. In the context of CHJ's work in Greenlawn, their work highlights the unfortunate opposition between organizing around an anachronistic vanguard and appealing to a top-heavy political machine for deliverance from social ills like crime and lack of community.

JK Gibson-Graham see economic politics as a challenge in itself, to political imaginations, ethical subjectivity, communal imagination and, by my formulations, folkways that are ill-equipped for "the poverty of economic subjectivity, with its few identity positions and contracting (if also intensifying) desires; and the persistent conviction that large-scale, coordinated action was required for the task of economic transformation." I am unable, at this early stage, to articulate productive possibilities for Greenlawn, but I am prepared to take steps to make room for place-making and the cultivation of noncapitalist subjectivity.

I see two possibilities for "doing business" with the social codes that inhabit Greenlawn. Both are efforts to engage with subjects in place by speaking for spaces and with one another. One is to work with ex-gang members and, for lack of a better term, "at-risk youth" to bring diverse yet semiotically linked actors into regular encounter. The other is to use the enclosure spaces to which I have access (such as Hart) to invite and cultivate communal imaginations through group storytelling. I have collected enough stories on the east side to know that the

60 Monsieur Dupont. *Nihilist Communism*, (San Francisco: Ardent Press, 2003) 17. While CHJ members do not imagine their work as necessarily "revolutionary," many members take cues for organizing from old-school Marxist literatures, hence the notion that we might agitate a proletariat or raise the consciousness of the masses.

stories themselves have the potential to spark imaginations in their telling because they have sparked my own, and that doing so requires their circulation between residents, a practice that is presently lacking. I am pursuing both lines, and I hope to bring them into conversation with one another.

"So what are you gonna do?" asked Mr. Towers.

"Well, I'm trying to start a storytelling group out here. I think there's a lot of knowledge and a lot of ideas out here that just don't get shared. It seems like there's a generational gap too. I talk to some of the older people living here and they have all these stories about how different this place was thirty years ago. Some of 'em make it sound like a completely different place. And the younger people, even though they live in the same buildings, it seems like their worlds are completely different than the people who've been here for a long time; and the kids have a totally different perspective, too. I think people need to start a conversation and come to terms somehow if we're gonna find something we can fight for, here. Otherwise I'm just scaring people into listening to me, and you know I've got nothin to say, really."

I was hitting a bag in the boxing gym and I heard coach, once again, asking a man about his life plans. It's a common line of inquiry here. Usually coach just serves the question and never gets a committed response. If guys around here are planning their lives they're not ready to articulate those plans to coach. When this happens he's prone to tell them "get off your butt" or "ya gotta start thinking about this stuff." This guy, however, did have a plan. The plan is to register for the national guard in the coming year. Coach said "good for you, man. That's gonna change your life/get you outta here and into school." He said he's joining because it's so hard to find a job. Coach agreed and says "and if you can find a job it's all 'yes, massa,' 'no, massa' all

day long."

Only months later have I realized that I don't know how to answer those questions, either. Except to say that I am in school for only a few more short weeks. In the same breath I realize that not being ready to articulate life plans and answers to "what's going on" will be terribly difficult without a university program to cite. I am looking for ways of answering coach's question or, more accurately, I am looking for a language with which to answer deceptively simple questions like "what's going on." I'm looking for a language of difference that young men around Greenlawn might use to share stories with coach, myself, older generations and each other. The language of economic difference and productive work is focused on the institutions and programs which, in practice, exclude the people visiting Hart and living in Greenlawn. For the communal capacity to write social codes, the poverty of tales to tell is a poverty of imagination. There is another kind of poverty, that of lacking the right to tell the tales that we hear most (of subject positions like student, worker, and National Guardsman), but for establishing communal capacities, learning new stories has the potential to be productive of abundant economic, cultural, and social subjectivities.